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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AIAG (AMBASSADOR LOTFIS AND DAVID WINN), NEA/ELA  
DEPT PASS TO AID (DENNIS CARROLL)

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [KSTH](#) [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: GOE INFLUENZA PLANNING WELL UNDER WAY FOR ANNUAL  
PILGRIMAGES

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

1.(SBU) Key Points:

-- A Ministry of Health (MoH) senior official explained GOE plans to address increasing influenza concerns as it prepares for annual religious pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia.

--For the first time, MoH is collaborating with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to lead influenza awareness classes in all Egyptian public elementary, middle, and high schools.

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WHO WILL BE PREVENTED FROM RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGES?  
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12. (SBU) Egyptian MoH chief spokesperson Dr. Abd-El Rahman Shaheen told Emboff on August 4 that as a result of increasing influenza concerns, the GOE will implement new measures this year for its religious pilgrims. He explained that Egypt is planning to restrict travel for certain groups of individuals seeking to perform umrah (minor pilgrimage to Mecca performed at any time of the year) or hajj.

13. (SBU) According to Shaheen those considered "high-risk" for travel to Saudi Arabia include pregnant women, children under 12 years old, obese individuals, those with chronic ailments (e.g. diabetes, hypertension), and adults over 65 years old. This last category was MoH's biggest concern since many people do not undertake hajj until their later years and Shaheen worried how Egypt's elderly population would accept this decision. He noted the Arab health ministries now await a royal Saudi decree likely to ratify these recommendations; a decision is expected shortly "any day now."

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NEW PREVENTION MEASURES INTRODUCED  
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14. (SBU), MoH plans to combat influenza are already well under way. He noted that during umrah and hajj the GOE operates health clinics for Egyptian citizens in Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah; this year they will "significantly increase" staffing at those facilities. A doctor will travel on all umrah flights to monitor the health of Egyptian travelers. Another new measure involves requiring all individuals to possess a hospital-issued medical certificate stating they have no health problems preventing travel to Saudi Arabia. Copies of this certificate, which Shaheen listed as "tamper-proof", will be kept on file at issuing hospitals and will likely cost between 250-400 LE (\$45-72). Along with a yellow vaccination book traditionally carried by Egyptian pilgrims, all individuals must present this certificate at a port of departure. Shaheen also noted that the MoH

plans to quarantine every single returning pilgrim in the event of an influenza pandemic. Individuals will be taken to hospitals and clinics across the country.

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MANDATORY INFLUENZA CLASSES TO SWEEP EGYPTIAN SCHOOLS  
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¶5. (SBU) MoH is partnering with the MoE to prepare influenza awareness classes for all of its public elementary, middle, and high schools. On the first day of the Egyptian school year, likely to be September 22 following the day after Eid ul-Fitr marking the end of Ramadan, students will receive a 45 minute lesson in how to avoid contracting influenza. Teachers will explain that it is imperative to wash your hands with soap and water, keep a tidy desk, and maintain clean bathrooms. Shaheen noted this program could potentially reach 17 million students in 43,000 schools across the country.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: To date, MoH has done a relatively effective job in treating its influenza patients, especially those infected with H5N1. Individual human cases, particularly in children, are identified quickly and promptly treated at area hospitals. The H5N1 fatality rate in Egypt is 32% as compared to the global fatality rate of 66%. However, it is unclear if the GOE possesses the medical personnel, logistical capability, and financial resources to implement all of its new influenza initiatives, especially its pandemic response plans.

Scobey